

Uncovering the British Colonial Past in Northwest Florida

One of DoD's obligations, as a steward of the land it controls, is to protect cultural resources that are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Management of these resources first requires that they be identified and assessed for significance. Eglin Air Force Base has taken seriously its obligation to the American public and has a proactive program to consider, as part of its decision-making process, the ramifications of its actions on historic properties. When a site is determined eligible for nomination to the National Register, Eglin personnel carefully consider management options in an effort to protect and preserve these significant historic properties.

For both philosophical and fiscal reasons, Eglin's cultural resources managers do not consider excavation as the primary mitigation method when archeological sites are threatened. Philosophically, protection is the preferred avenue for management, allowing preservation of the sites, structures, and material remains of the past for future generations. On military lands, preservation is feasible since DoD's cultural resources, unlike those that are on private property, are often not threatened by development pressure. Consequently, sites and structures can frequently be saved for the future when techniques for discovering information about the past will have

improved. In addition to the philosophical rationale for protection, finances also offer incentive for preservation. Financial resources are becoming scarce, and it is often more cost effective to preserve sites than to excavate. However, unchangeable mission requirements or natural threats such as erosion may sometimes make it necessary to recover data or risk the imminent loss of the site, as was the case at site 8SR1251. Located on the western edge of the Eglin reservation, this site dates to Florida's British Colonial Period between 1763 and 1781. The site is of particular importance to the history of the region. It is located in an area which would have been a frontier during the time of its occupation, meaning it was not part of the main settlement of Pensacola. As such, it represents an outlying British settlement, a type which heretofore had not been studied in northwest Florida.

Because of the importance of this site, Eglin's cultural resource manager decided to "bank" it, that is, to protect the site from natural and cultural impacts as an asset for future generations. Unfortunately, natural events of 1995 swiftly challenged that plan.

In August and October of 1995, two fierce hurricanes visited the northwest coast of Florida, creating substantial damage to personal property and the shoreline. Historical properties were not spared. Not only was much of 8SR1251 lost imme-

Fig. 1 (below). Brick scatter indicating the location of a former chimney with structure 2.

Fig. 2 (right). Architectural items.





Fig. 3. Fragments of bottles and a glass stem (above).

Fig. 4. Ceramics including scratch blue, porcelain, tin, and saltglaze earthenware (right).



Fig. 5. Items of personal decoration.



Fig. 6. Cufflinks with coat of arms of King Carlos III of Spain.

other by a chimney fall and wall trenches (Fig. 1). The function of the structures has not been determined, but the artifacts recovered provide evidence of a variety of activities. Artifact classes represented in the collection include those associated with the colonial kitchen, architecture (Fig. 2), arms, and personal items. In addition, the assemblage contains evidence of specialized activities such as fishing.

While the occupants of the site may be considered marginal to the larger area settlements of Pensacola and Mobile, they possessed some of the finer material goods that the world had to offer. We have found evidence of the presence of wine

diately as a result of the impacts, but the remainder was threatened as a result of storm damage to protective barriers.

Eglin's cultural resources manager determined that excavation was necessary to salvage the remaining data. In consultation with Florida's State Historic Preservation Officer, a data recovery plan was devised, and the necessary permits

obtained. Data recovery began in the summer of 1996 and has continued intermittently since.

Excavation at the site has proven that the decision to initiate salvage data recovery was judicious. The large number of artifacts recovered provide previously unknown details of the 18th-century life of isolated British settlers in the Florida panhandle. The investigations uncovered evidence of two former structures: one is represented by brick footings or wall supports, and the

and other spirits, decorated blown glasses for their consumption (Fig. 3), porcelain from China, and tin glazed earthenware from continental Europe and England (Fig. 4). Numerous items of personal adornment have also been recovered. These include beads, a medallion, buttons from a coat issued to the British 16th Regiment of Foot (Fig. 5), and cufflinks with the coat of arms of King Carlos III of Spain (Fig. 6). Together, the items are not the material culture one might expect from the pioneer sort competing for the basics of life on the edge of the frontier.

Cataloguing of the artifacts is well underway and formal analysis will soon follow. Even at this point in the research, however, it is clear that the excavations have salvaged a rich chronicle of early European settlement in the Florida panhandle. The artifacts have afforded a window on a rather narrow span of time not previously represented in the region's archeological record. The data recovered through controlled excavation represent a significant advancement in knowledge—an advancement which would likely have been lost to time and tides without Eglin's proactive cultural resources management program.



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